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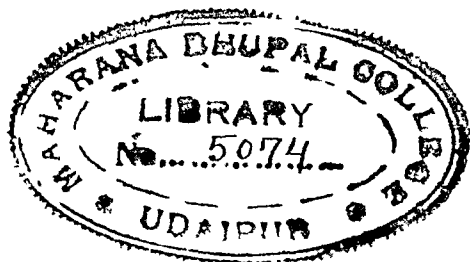
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# THE AMAZONS

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## POEMS

by YVONNE FRENCH



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Y. ff.

## MYTHOLOGY AND SCRIPTURE

## *The Amazons*

THE inextinguishable sun; a sky  
Of brass over the Abyssinian waste.  
Hills to the south, arid and rock-encased  
For months, are tired and torrentless and dry.  
Born of the sand and drifting like a sigh  
A column cloud advances in hot haste  
And all the rocks re-echo as the chaste  
And stormy-hearted Amazons go by.

Their eyes like diamonds flashing in a mine  
In each dark face fanatically shine,  
Their wild hair mingles with their helmet crests;  
And as Penthesilea swings her blade  
The foe recoils defeated and dismayed  
With horror at their mutilated breasts.

## *Andromache Bereaved*

TUMULT below the walls of Troy is stilled;  
Subdued, the Amazons fling down their arms  
And see the sloping sun behind the palms  
Inflame the rigid bodies of the killed.  
This evening nothing matters any more;  
A few scared jackals cringing from the fires  
Hear from afar the sound of mourning lyres  
For Hector, dead, and for the epic war.

Now, even now Andromache, austere,  
Doric and calm beside the spattered bier,  
Carves in Antiquity her tragic frieze;  
And as the day turns routed from the skies  
She draws the hero's head upon her knees,  
And Helen, shamed, averts her troubled eyes.



*Et in Arcadia Ego*

SHEPHERDS, Arcadian shepherds leave your flocks  
Grazing in slow contentment in the glade.  
Come, where I lie at rest beneath the shade  
Of these green olives through whose silver locks  
A faint and scented wind breathes ancient dreams.  
Shepherds draw closer yet, and have no fears  
Of one who climbing down the ascending years  
Returns a wistful wraith from Stygian streams.

Cast not aside your broad-brimmed hats and staves  
Shepherds, I have but come to ask you whether  
Long years ago in Thessaly you saw  
At break of day, emerging from their caves  
Uprooting trees and trampling down the heather,  
The Centaurs and the Lapithae at war?

## *Underworld*

STYX is a stream of sadder tides than those  
Where you now trail your hands and cool your feet  
Among fresh marigolds and meadowsweet.  
Upon its shores no flower ever grows;  
Nor sign to tell the traveller where he goes,  
But a dumb waterman comes up to meet  
His passenger, and leads him to his seat  
And ferries him across to his repose.

In these dark waters no vainglorious swan  
Seeks his reflection; and the turbid stream  
Knows only Charon's shadow, bent and swaying  
The shore recedes all colourless and wan  
And the pale stranger hears as in a dream  
The hound across the river faintly baying.

## *Pan*

THEY visit me no more that often came  
On summer mornings, white, and drenched with  
dew,  
To wreath my shrine with laurel or with rue  
And swing a votive censer to my name.  
No, no, they come no longer, for the star  
Of woodland deities has now forever  
Set; and stranger gods have called the nymphs to sever  
From old beliefs and follow them afar.

Moss gathers on my horns: the wild briar weaves  
Round them divinity's eternal crown;  
The sun shoots arrows through the leopard leaves  
That fleck the fluted pillar gold and brown.  
Still with cleft hooves that bruise my trampled tomb  
Clamour the flocks that mourn me in the gloom.

## *Sub Imperio Augusti*

.      *After Hérédia*

As on a rich, illuminated page  
Loaded with gold, and silver, and enamels,  
The Wise Men on their starlit pilgrimage  
Headed a swaying caravan of camels  
To pay their homage to a sleeping child;  
With gems, and spices, and celestial globes  
Across a territory, white, and wild  
Their sombre slaves sustained their gorgeous robes.

Then stooping low within the sainted shed,  
Humbly discarding their magnificence,  
They knelt before the meagre, makeshift bed;  
And thus, of old, in answer to a star  
Presenting gold, and myrrh, and frankincense,  
Came Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar.

## *The Search for Truth*

THROUGH a green shade diffusing greener light  
The lamp, like Truth, falling upon me, glows.  
It warms the books in rich, complacent rows  
And disinherits the approaching night.  
But lest I search for Truth she slips away  
And in her wilder habitations dwells  
Among the brown bees in their hollow hills  
Shadowed in caves throughout the blazing day.

Here then am I, lost in the night of doubt.  
A traveller in the continent of doubt;  
Needing a sign like that prophetic pyre  
That led the returning Children, mute and bowed;  
That moved above the Red Sea like a cloud  
And clove the Egyptian night with towers of fire.

## *The Trebia*

*After Hérédia* .

THE fatal day dawned coldly, and revealed  
The waking camp: the river ran in flood  
Where the Numidian squadrons stanchèd their blood.  
The air resounded as the trumpets pealed.  
Scorning false auguries and Scipio's warning,  
The swollen Trebia and the wind and rain,  
Sempronius Consul, glorious and vain,  
Had pushed his lictors on into the morning.

In the black sky a lurid line proclaimed  
The sacked Insubrian villages that flamed,  
An elephant trumpeted afar and stirred:  
And thus, below the bridge against an arch,  
Hannibal, musing on his triumphs, heard  
The muffled tramp of legions on the march.

## *The Prophet*

HIGH in the mountains when the sun has fired  
A last salute extinguishing the day,  
The evening closes nebulous and grey  
About the region where he lives retired.  
And having prophesied a truth required  
Though none will listen to his words to-day  
Here, where the torrent sweeps his voice away  
He lives alone, and utterly inspired.

Darkness delivers him his dreams; his cries  
Echo calamitously round the skies;  
His warnings fall upon the heedless air.  
Until he sees, as dawn dispels the gloom,  
The world embarking on a sea of doom  
In those twin ships, Disaster and Despair.

## *The Scapegoat*

BURDENED with great iniquity and pain  
In the vast wilderness of human scorn  
The scapegoat travels on towards the dawn  
Another outcast yet, another Cain.  
No herdsmen claim him now, for him in vain  
All pasturelands and bright, sweet streams are torn,  
And leader's bells, and struggles horn to horn  
In the green valleys of his old domain.

In some precipitous ravine of stones  
He stumbles on his predecessor's bones,  
Pale sepulchre of unresisted blame;  
Then idly, where a few sparse grasses grow  
He crops the stunted nettles of his woe  
And drinks the brackish waters of his shame.



NATURE

## *In Cornwall*

ABOVE the cliffs, those whetstones of the ocean  
That hurls its foaming breakers to be ground  
Against them in tumultuous commotion  
Of effervescing surge, and spume, and sound;  
The crying cormorants and black-backed gulls  
Scream in their wheeling flight above the shale,  
Steeplly ascending with the rising gale  
Or falling, leaflike, as the tempest lulls.

On rocks that ring with melancholy cries  
Their wings will fold upon the form of Sleep  
Dropping, with sunset and the wind, their flight.  
Then up from the unfathomable deep  
Pale as romance the winter moon will rise;  
And Iseult's ship shall navigate the night.

## *Bas-relief*

WHEN moving clouds are sculptural and cold,  
Chipped by the chisel of the evening breeze,  
They fringe the sky in a heroic frieze  
Assuming forms fantastically bold.  
Changing their attitudes by slow degrees,  
Heraldic beasts whose rampant limbs unfold  
Dissolve in furnaces of molten gold;  
And brooding Titans hug their mighty knees.

Though the dark pinions of the twilight screen  
The glorious Gods, recumbent in their cars  
Whose plunging horses chariot them to heaven;  
They too are there, inhabiting the stars,  
Perfect, as those diminished figures seen  
On ancient seals in chalcedony graven.

## *Evening at Bellosguardo*

COME, for the slanting sun has on this tower  
And its surrounding cypresses, a rain  
Of purest gold distilled, and every pane  
Glow like a furnace at its fiery power.  
Now all the hours are walking hand in hand:  
But dawn, the last, is pinioned by the wrists;  
While dusk, enveloped by surrounding mists,  
Closes the eyes of an exhausted land.

A cypress shadow like a sombre steeple  
Crosses our path and points towards the gloom.  
And we, upon the terrace, looking down,  
Watch red fires smoulder out from every room;  
Hear emptiness descend upon the town  
And darkness on the laughter of the people.

## *Farewell to Florence*

NOW that I leave this town of scarlet lilies  
By night and in the dark October rain,  
Strange images confront me of Cockaigne  
Where the moist meadows breathe of amaryllis.  
Now swept by wild autumnal gales her trees  
Call to me desperately: Turn, Return!  
To powers stronger than the spells you learn  
From voices over siren-haunted seas.

To-morrow's skies will be as calm and clear  
In Tuscany as those of yesterday;  
Warm with the breath of vintage and of sun.  
But I shall see a coastline, white and grey,  
The mirthless gravity of Dover pier  
And London in the twilight, huge and dun.

## *The Pine Forest near Pisa*

I SAW as dark spectators by the sea,  
Their ranks fast rooted in the grinding sand,  
The pines, the sombre shadows of the land  
Veiling the sunburnt coast of Tuscany.  
Their green arms waved with rapture at the strong  
Westerly gales that water them with brine;  
But warm the windless summers, and divine  
The sea's long, low, uninterrupted song.

No one to-day is living who can tell  
What these unageing pines remember well.  
For in their shade, on fiercer noons than these  
Forging his inspiration like a chain,  
Shelley would walk abstractedly, while Jane  
Sang to him from a distance through the trees.

## *The Flight*

THE blocks are moved releasing her. She swings  
Speeding like wind across the grass-blown ground.  
Swift in the winter sunlight, wheeling round  
She pauses, breathes and shivers through her wings.  
Then roaring glory, into blue she sings,  
Storming the heights of heaven to astound  
The little world below, confined and bound  
By old beliefs and dull imaginings.

Now we are hanging sideways in the sky,  
My heart beats sullenly as I descry  
The sulphur cities smoking in the plains  
And call to memory that Michael hurled  
Forth from this loneliness where beauty reigns  
The lost Archangel on a driven world.

## THE TROPICS



## *Equatorial Forests*

THROUGHOUT the year their days are much the same,  
Grand, and extravagant, and very still;  
For sunk in torrid lethargies of will  
The seasons change no substance but their name.  
Rain and intolerable heat they bear  
Whose slow, successive days are uniform,  
And every suffocating night a storm  
Charges the thunderless, electric air.

Along profound, impenetrable ways  
Fearful and fabulous lianas raise  
Their spiral tendrils poisonously curled.  
And lit by violent flashes in the sky  
The monstrous scene awaking, vividly  
Resembles the creation of the world.

## *Sunrise in the Tropics*

GREY as the banks of mud on which they tilt  
Their armoured heads, the alligators smile;  
Alternately disclosing greed and guile  
While staring at the thickly moving silt.  
And when the suffocating night has gone  
Discovered by the dawn in quick surprise,  
They blink the shutters of their gilded eyes  
And turn and plunge into the Amazon.

Feeling the sun's incendiary hand  
Ignite the densely vegetated land  
Parrots and brilliant parrakeets emerge;  
And leaving their green palaces and domes  
They scream across the forest's leafy verge  
Like fugitives forsaking stricken homes.

## *The Elephants*

ON the cold terrace of a winter sky,  
Blotting the nascent moon from earthly sight,  
Yet fringed by one pale filament of white  
The clouds patrol monotonously by.  
The mango grove is sinister and sly  
And on the boughs no foliage hides the night  
That shrinks from contact with the leaping light  
Cast by our watchfires burning fitfully.

This is no tent but an enchanted ark  
Where sounds on myriad sounds have leapt and stirred.  
There is no comfort in the pulsing dark  
Till, through the rhythmic singing of the crickets,  
Mighty and chained the elephants are heard  
Restlessly stamping at their hammered pickets.

## *Water Buffaloes*

THEY haunt the shadowless and shoreless jheel  
That breeds white heat, malaria and flies;  
And that the Indian sun's transmuting eyes  
Has burnished till it seems a lake of steel.  
Across the water skims a flight of teal,  
A ripple on its surface spreads and dies.  
The frail reeds stir, and in their Paradise  
Of cool content, the buffaloes reveal

Their dark grey heads magnificently crowned  
Whose bodies stand invisible and drowned  
In shallows that the thirsty noon devours.  
And so, like mystics in a state of grace  
That mildly meditate on time and space,  
With clay-blue eyes they pass the scorching hours.

## *In the South Atlantic*

VAGRANT and slow, white avenues of clouds  
Sail in high regions of the darkened sky,  
A flock of tireless ghosts who trail their shrouds  
Far out across the night's immensity.  
Who are these lonely spirits? from what land  
Of cold aerial enchantment glide  
These silent phantoms mirrored in the sand  
Of the Atlantic shore's receding tide?

Roll on, cold citadels of stormless life,  
We are too crude to gather to your breast  
Like sleeping children; still too unrefined,  
Polluted by the frenzy of our strife,  
To seek the shadows of your clouded rest  
And drug the fitful terrors of the mind.

## OCCASIONAL STANZAS

*Lines on Some Ruins by a River*

GREEN weeds and grass spring up from crevices,  
And here and there a small, earth-fallen star  
A dandelion shines. On lofty terraces  
The purple scabious blossoms from afar.

Below the grey and ivy-strangled keep  
The moat is overgrown and the young larches  
Extend their arms to where untroubled sheep  
Crop the thick verdure under shattered arches.

River, reflect it then; and then reflect  
Time's gentle hand upon its failing heart;  
And let your vision be more circumspect  
Than any painter's with his vaunted art.

*Lines on Some Eucalyptus Leaves*

**Y**ou scimitars of tender bloom  
Whose fragrance inundates the room

Sweeping your silver scythes in air  
Made warmer to preserve you there;

What vandal tore you from the shade  
Of that reviving colonnade

Through whose grey groves insistently  
Murmured the dark Tyrhennian sea?

Time after time, when one by one  
The slow clouds drift across the sun,

Meet and dispel, and meet again  
To swell and rally into rain;

When pale, discarded leaves are sent  
Carreering to their banishment,

And in the London afternoon  
The blood-red sun goes down too soon;

Swung on your fragrance to the South  
I feel the warm air fan my mouth

And once again Sicilian shores  
Are lit by classic meteors

And nightingales and sea-washed shells  
Sing at my head and feet like bells:

Till darkness shows you suddenly grown  
As silver as the sickle moon.



## Snow

MORNING! how dark and grave you are.  
Was the sun here, and has it gone?  
Shone ever a white, seraphic star  
In that despairing sky, alone?

Draw my green curtains, let there be  
No more this February day;  
No more that stretch of wintry sea  
So desolately bleak and grey.

Yet leave them open. So reveal  
That ghostly tree, that bitter thorn,  
Whose fingers, riveted with steel  
Clutch at the rigour of your dawn.

For as a felon dreads the wrath  
Of his tormentor, now you grow  
Livid before the sullen north  
And brood upon its coming snow.

### *Homecoming*

**D**RY leaves are blown along the empty street,  
A cold grey light prevails.  
The frosted pavement echoes with my feet,  
And my heart fails.

### *Winter Over*

**Z**EPHYRS now blow and buds grow daily fatter,  
The shepherd meets the season with a sigh;  
And all the clouds unharnessed gently scatter  
To pasture in the meadows of the sky.

**B**LIND are the fringed eyes,  
The contours in repose,  
In virgin linen lies  
The white and bloodless rose.

The tintless lids are veiled,  
The chiselled nostrils breathing,  
A smile is even wreathing  
The lips that death has palcd.

The alabaster brow  
Transparent as the air,  
Is purple-netted snow  
On either temple where

The intersecting veins  
Like webbings of intrigue  
Are mingled in a league  
Of terror-binding chains.

The voice for ever mute  
O nevermore revive  
With missal or with lute  
That cherished it alive;

And nevermore disturb  
From the unfévered breast  
The waxen hands at rest  
That plucked the bitter herb.

FAR from the land where horn-rimmed Culture peers  
With powerful lenses at its cancered brain,  
And Relaxation, phoned about the ears  
Clashes its cymbals to a negro strain;

The great queen, coiling through her torrid lands  
And steaming forests, like a python, gleams,  
Till dawn, exposing her with fiery hands,  
Breaks through the sullen splendour of her dreams.

She lies there, vast, uncivilised, supine,  
Her savage beauty bears no trace of scars;  
And on her brows the glittering Andes shine,  
Plumed by her palms and circled with her stars.

# *The Condor*

*After Leconte de Lisle*

BEYOND the structures of the rigid Range,  
Past drifting mists where shadow eagles fly,  
Past crater funnels yawning near the sky  
Whose sluggish streams of lava interchange;

His wings distended, scarlet streaked on dun  
The vast bird broods with melancholy grace  
In silence, at America and space  
While his cold eyes reflect the dying sun.

The night rolls onward from the east where wild  
Hill terraces enclose the pampas downs  
And cradles Chile, villages and towns,  
And the Pacific, limitless and mild.

And all the continent is now embraced  
From shore and slope, to gorge and steep divide;  
From crest to crest it eddies till the tide  
Flows over and the whole world is effaced.

Bathed in a flush that inundates the snow  
Poised like a phantom on a craggy height,  
He waits the flooding of the waves of night;  
They break across him conquering the glow.

Out of the void the Southern Cross illumines  
The coasts of Heaven with constellated flares.

He rattles harshly with delight; he rears  
His skinny, muscled neck and shakes his plumes,

And whipping up the Andes' bitter snow  
Screaming, he soars to where no winds can blow,  
And far above the dark and distant sphere  
He sleeps, on giant wings, in glacial air.

## *Recollection of Ludwigslust*

IN avenues deserted by the sun  
Summer long fled, the sodden earth receives  
The relics of your withered linden-leaves  
And buries them in silence one by one.

Honeyed no more by bees their flowers fade,  
No longer need their drifting odours last  
When hour by tintless hour becomes the past  
Whose sun has perished in the arms of shade.

Now breathing fumes of aromatic musk  
The season pauses mistily to bruise  
Those stagnant waters, where the lilies cruise  
Mild as magnolias in the summer dusk.

Now steel winds strip the labyrinth of leaves,  
Wreck the rich borders and the sombre grove,  
While in the evergreens a spectral dove  
Invokes her sisters in the sloping eaves.

Foredoomed to solitude, forsaken, dark,  
The stone Minerva shall your priestess be;  
And in the night, above the lonely park,  
The wild swans' cry shall be your elegy.

*To Autumn*

WEARY of winter  
And sick of the spring;  
Detesting the summer  
And all it will bring  
I turn to your stillness.  
And my eyes are kissed  
By the moist melancholy  
Of your falling mist.



## *The Flowers*

Go not into the garden for they sleep.  
The dew-drenched evening swings them to her  
heart;  
And their pale heads hang drowsily and keep  
(Following the insect-murmur of the day)  
The tune and traffic of uncounted bees.

Already dreaming, see, they cast away  
All thought of gardens, and the gentle breeze  
Fans them along to visit in the fields  
Their shy, wild sisters of a poorer soil;  
To envy them their pastoral liberty  
And bright felicity.

While some, in dreams, explore the ocean-bed  
And are transported thither in all speed  
To trail their oozy petals, garlanded,  
Through glaucous caverns where, amongst the weed,  
They bow and wave and quiver in the stream.

Go not into the garden for they dream.

## *To a Gardener Trimming a Laurel*

GARDENER, spare the laurel queen,  
Spare each leaf of glistering green,

Each shining lozenge is a strand  
Of Daphne's locks; perhaps her hand

Stretches in supplication where  
Your sickle menaces her hair.

Shearing her lustrous comeliness  
You will occasion her distress

And terrify, with probing dart,  
The birds that flutter at her heart

Whose dark recesses, cool and still,  
Are sanctuary and citadel.

Gardener, gardener, Daphne's tears  
Glitter on your steely shears;

Spare her pride and spare her pain.  
Ringed with jewels by the rain

Spare each chrysoberyl finger;  
Suffer her awhile to linger

As the daughter of a king  
Green, and bright, and flourishing.

## *A Landscape Painting*

REST in the sun-warmed grass,  
Indolent child;  
And watch the shadows pass  
Above your head  
In the tremulous August air.  
Everywhere  
Labour stands still;  
No birds are singing here  
And high noon reigns.  
By the water mill and the weir  
A motion pacifies the air  
Eager for rhythm.

Rest in the fountainous grass  
And let the sun, gold archer, fleck  
And freckle your pale skin  
Through the wide lattice of a shady straw;  
Dapple your neck  
And gild the peach  
To apricot upon your cheek  
More, and still more.

What fancies throng your thoughts?  
Are you—as the late afternoon deepens  
And the sun pursues his rapturous course  
Right to the end in a flaming sky,  
Casting a benison across the lake—

Are you who lie there calm and mild,  
Caught in his blushes,  
Unaware  
Of setting suns, impassive child?  
And swans in flight  
Above the rushes?

## *Street Music*

SULTRY the house and in the heat  
More sultry still the summer night,  
As she leans out in slack delight  
And gazes down the airless street.

Beneath an arc of lantern light  
Thin single notes come up to meet  
The Irish servant, and invite  
Forgetfulness to bathe her feet.

Old tunes arise.  
How plaintively they come  
Plucked by the harpist hand.  
The feet forget their restlessness  
The hands repose their dull distress  
Thinking themselves at home.

By some metamorphosis, strange  
The bricks around the window change;  
The sill shoots jessamine, the eaves  
Droop with the weight of ivy leaves;  
And in the vaporous distance, rain  
Freshens the cattle-trodden lane.

Old songs, old tunes,  
Old half-remembered airs  
And all Moore's melodies

Flood through the night in iridescent streams.  
Rest, aching feet,  
And swollen hands lie still.

Charmed is the moment, O persuading harp!  
And charmed her dreams.

## *The Triumph*

ONCE as the sun leant low upon the sea  
And with its red blade carved a mass of cloud,  
My Muse, thought-reading, interrupted me  
With "Look at Heaven's festivals at last!"  
And coldly, "Where?" I said to her aloud.

Then scarcely larger than a distant sail  
That flaming sun had vanished from my view;  
But tinted monumentally, its trail  
Revealed immense processions as they passed;  
And Triumph with his rosy retinue.

THE END

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